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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 000599

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [FR](#) [EUN](#) [KNNP](#) [KPAL](#)  
SUBJECT: FORMER FM VEDRINE ON MIDDLE EAST, IRAN, EUROPE,  
FRANCE

Classified By: AMB Craig Stapleton for reasons 1.4 (B & D).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a January 26 breakfast meeting with the Ambassador, former FM Hubert Vedrine provided a tour d'horizon on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (it all depends on Israel and, specifically, the eclipse of the Likud), Iran (the difficulties of preventing it from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability), the EU (now's the time for concrete projects, not constitutions), the domestic political scene (alienation of the French electorate) and Socialist prospects for victory in the upcoming presidential elections. Vedrine assumed that Interior Sarkozy would win the governing party's nomination for the presidency. He argued that the plethora of Socialist candidates could result in the choice of former PM Jospin as the Socialist Party establishment's consensus candidate. End Summary.

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and BMENA  
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¶2. (C) Vedrine said that a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would depend primarily on Israel, which still needed to be convinced that the establishment of a Palestinian state was its own vital national interest. However, a negotiated solution to the conflict was not indispensable; Israel could move ahead on its own. Sharon had taken a critical step in breaking with Likud's vision of a Greater Israel; he hoped that Olmert would be able to finish the work. He held out a signed agreement between the two sides as possible, while predicting that the Palestinian courageous enough to sign it would probably pay with his life. A transitional solution should be something close to Israel's 1967 borders, along with acceptance of a "symbolic" number of refugee returns. (Note: It was unknown at the time of the discussion that Hamas had won the Palestinian elections. End note.)

¶3. (C) Interpreting BMENA as a U.S. attempt in part to avoid dealing directly with the conflict, he asserted that ending this conflict remained key to changing Arab views toward the U.S. and democratization. Solving the conflict could make the U.S. wildly popular across the region, since the Arabs had no sustained historical grievances against the U.S. This was not the case for their former European colonizers, which limits Europe's role in finding a solution (although it can contribute in other ways). He said it would be a mistake to view democracy as a religion. It was a legitimate goal, but not something that could be accomplished overnight, or even in the immediate future. He called for a triangular approach among the U.S., the EU, and the Arab world in promoting reform.

Iran  
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¶4. (C) Vedrine saw few prospects for dissuading Iran from

seeking a nuclear weapons capability, on which there was broad national(istic) consensus. If it could not be prevented, it could however be delayed. He saw no prospects for UN action under Chapter VII, meaning that any eventual strike would require the U.S. to act alone. He criticized Chirac's recent speech on deterrence (ref A) for offering "too much precision; ambiguity has its uses." He judged that the U.S. would have difficulty convincing other UNSC members to adopt sanctions against Iran, given the negative ramifications of a crisis for oil prices. Vedrine said the West should also seek opportunities to increase divisions within the Iranian leadership. He thought that Russia might still play a useful role.

15. (C) More generally, Vedrine, surprisingly complacent, judged that a nuclear Iran need not necessarily result in increased instability, nothing that the U.S. had opposed Russian and Chinese acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability as well. As others before it, Iran would learn to assume its responsibilities as a nuclear power. He advocated consideration of a bold U.S. move to engage Tehran, along the lines of Kissinger's outreach to China.

Whither the EU?

16. (C) Vedrine contended that the EU constitutional treaty was dead as a practical matter and that some countries (citing Germany) were foolish to think it could be resuscitated in a year or two. Saying that the treaty was not a constitution in any case, he called for using big projects (along the lines of Airbus, Galileo, ITER, etc.) and better economic policy coordination within the Eurozone to forge a greater sense of a common European identity. He also thought it might be possible to "cherry pick" those parts of

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the treaty dealing with critical institutional reforms and adopt them in piecemeal fashion. Vedrine concluded that Europe would "float" for a while, given the impact of enlargement and growing divisions, as well as the absence of real leadership among European political leaders.

Russia Not on Radar Screen

17. (C) Asked about Russia, Vedrine said simply that democratization was a long road and would require 20-30 years. He was nonetheless optimistic over the long term.

French Presidential elections

18. (C) Vedrine lamented the profound disillusionment of the French electorate with the political elites. He decried the growing preference for candidates (like Segolene Royal) with whom they could identify, as opposed to those with leadership potential, whatever their personal characteristics. He described the current political scene as a battle on the right (Comment: between PM Villepin and Interior Minister Sarkozy. End comment.) and uncertainty on the left (Comment: among a number of declared candidates. End comment.), resulting in what he called "systemic political confusion." He also regretted that the Socialist Party, obsessed as it was with repeating Mitterrand's election strategy of capturing the far left as a means of disarming it, was drifting leftward and in danger of no longer ceasing to be the "modern" party that he and Mitterrand had labored to establish.

19. (C) Vedrine judged that Interior Minister Sarkozy's control of the governing UMP party apparatus made it likely that he, and not PM de Villepin, would be the party's candidate for the presidency. Asked about Socialist Party presidential candidate and current media darling Segolene Royal, Vedrine said the electorate was projecting onto her

its own desire for change. In reality, she was a disagreeable and mean-spirited person, whose political views he dismissed as a mix of economic radicalism and social reactionism. Vedrine feared that a plethora of Socialist candidates could boost the fortunes of former FM Fabius in a primary among party members, although in the end such an outcome would be unacceptable to the mainstream party leadership. Faced with such a prospect, the mainstream, anybody-but-Fabius faction might decide to unite behind a single candidate, very likely former PM Lionel Jospin. Vedrine assured us that Jospin would be available under the right circumstances.

Comment

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¶10. (C) Vedrine, as always styling himself as a "realist," was his straightforward, ironic, self. Compared to many of France's political elite, perhaps precisely because he no longer holds a government position, he is remarkably free of resentment toward the U.S. and accepts both the reality of U.S. power and putting it to use to further U.S. goals.

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